

Abstract 747

TITLE: Gender Issues and HIV Prevention Policy: The Transgender Experience

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When examining gender issues and HIV prevention policy, it is critical to consider the experience of transgender persons. Unfortunately, the needs and risks of transgender persons were ignored until late in the epidemic. As most HIV prevention education uses language that assumes congruent natal sex, gender identity, and social sex role, transgendered persons have faced significant barriers to accessing information relevant to their lifestyle. Because of their minority and stigmatized status, transgendered persons face significant cofactors fueling risk, including a history of violence and abuse, poverty and unemployment, greater involvement in sex work, and unprotected anal intercourse. The transgender community is also at a less structured and developed stage than the gay community.

Although epidemiological studies have yet to be undertaken, studies of HIV prevalence in clinical populations indicate that certain subpopulations of transgendered persons have some of the highest infection rates in the United States. Since 1992, the University of Minnesota Medical School's Program in Human Sexuality has collaborated with transgender community organizations to research the HIV/STD prevention needs of transgendered persons, and pilot prevention programs to specifically address transgender concerns.

In 1992, in collaboration with transgender community organizations, we developed the first targeted transgender HIV prevention education program in the United States. Needs assessment revealed risk (co)factors of shame and isolation, search for affirmation, and sharing needles while injecting hormones, and called for community involvement and peer education. We implemented and evaluated three half-day workshops based on the Health Belief Model, eroticizing safer sex, and empowerment. Subsequently, we developed a two-day All Gender Health seminar based on sexual health approach to lowering long-term risk behavior. The seminar promotes sexual competence and esteem by helping participants become more knowledgeable and positive about their body, identity, and sexuality, confronting sexual health challenges across the life-span (including gender dysphoria, sexual assault, prostitution, and substance abuse), improving sexual communication (including disclosure of transgender identity and HIV status), and building dating and intimacy skills. Combining education, research and entertainment, the seminar contains lectures, exercises, videos, panels, performances, and small groups facilitated by peer educators.

Based on our research and experience in promoting HIV prevention among transgendered persons, this presentation will summarize practical lessons learned for HIV prevention policy, especially as it pertains to the risks and needs of transgender persons.

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